

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego of Colombia

April 20, 2023

President Biden. Well, Mr. President, welcome. It's great to see you here in the Oval Office and in Washington.

And, by the way, happy birthday.

President Petro. [Laughter] *Gracias. Muy amable.*

It was yesterday. The 19th of April is a very important date for Colombia, for Latin America, and for me as well.

President Biden. Well, it's very difficult turning 40 years of age. [Laughter]

President Petro. They say that, in this generation, being 63 is like being 40 in the old generation.

President Biden. I fully subscribe to that. [Laughter]

Mr. President, I've long believed, as you probably know, that Colombia is the key to the hemisphere—and I mean that sincerely—the keystone. And I think we have an opportunity, if we work at it hard enough, to have a Western Hemisphere that is united, equal, democratic, and economically prosperous.

Together, Colombia and the United States are leading an effort to deal with climate change and to—I've been working for a long time, and we make—we're going to make a \$500 million commitment to deal with preserving the Amazon.

And working through the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, we're working to grow our economies from the bottom up and the middle out, not from the top down. And I know we share one view very passionately: that it's inherent—their inherent dignity and the rights of individual workers.

We're also working together to counter narcotics trafficking and address the historic levels of migration in our hemisphere, especially through the Darién Gap.

And, Mr. President, I want to thank you for the hospitality and support Colombia continues to show to Venezuelan refugees. It's a humanitarian and a generous thing for you—that you're doing. And as I know you know, we're working closely with regional partners to help Colombia meet this challenge, which is consequential and costly.

And I really want to thank you for your outspoken and strong commitment to peace and human rights across the Americas. You speak to it all the time.

And as we begin the next century of our partnership, I believe we can do even more to deepen and develop cooperation. So I want to thank you again for taking the time to be here, and I look forward to our conversations.

President Petro. *Gracias.*

The Americas has, across all the countries, two common elements in its history. Unlike other parts of the world, our countries grew ever since their founding under the concepts of democracy and freedom.

The concept of democracy and freedom is not etched in stone; rather, it is a flow. It flows along, and it evolves with history and becomes ever more profound. So we are going down the same river, a river that leads us to ever greater democracy and ever greater freedom.

We also share in common that in this hemisphere there's almost never been war between the nations, between the peoples. We are well accustomed to peace and not war. Therefore, democracy, freedom, and peace constitute our common agenda.

And if we look at the economy, today, humankind and the whole Earth calls for an in-depth, thoroughgoing economic change. We need to move from a fossil fuel sort of capital, the coveting of fossil fuel—which has evolved like a hurricane that is increasingly threatening our existence—to an economy that does not use coal, oil, or gas.

If we put together these pillars of political and economic—on the political side, democracy, freedom, and peace; and on the economic side, building decarbonized economies—then I think we can have a common destiny whereby this region of the Americas can become a beacon for all humankind.

I believe that humankind in the Americas may well have the greatest potential for democracy and freedom in the Americas, as well as the greatest potential for green energies—clean energies.

So we have a common agenda and a lot of work to do.

Thank you so much for having received me in your house.

President Biden. Well, I couldn't agree with you more.

By the way, this morning I had a teleconference with 10 other nations in preparation for the next COP meeting. And I honestly believe we're making some real progress moving toward a carbon-free environment.

And one of the things we may talk about is how we can be of assistance in coming through the Panama Canal to Colombia for your electric needs. But that's for a longer discussion.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Petro spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Colombia, President Petro.

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